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## **Juan Manuel de Rosas and His Life**

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### **Juan Manuel de Rosas and His Life**

Juan Manuel de Rosas has often been disputed over the years. Some believed him to be a power hungry maniac who would do anything for power. Others saw him as laying the foundation for Argentina to grow. Different people who met him argue different ways, but the question is what kind of man was Juan Manuel de Rosas?

Juan Manuel de Rosas was born under the name Juan Manuel Ortiz de Rozas. He was born in the year 1793 and died in 1877. Juan would eventually become dictator of Argentina from 1829 to 1852, and was one of the first famous caudillos in South America. Rosas has always been associated with violence and vengeance; one of his political enemies accused him of assassinating 722 people, shooting 1,393, and beheading 3,765 people. Another detractor wrote that during the "age of Rosas" twenty thousand people were either killed or exiled for differing with Rosas in either political or administrator matters, (Dusenberry, 495). Evidence shows that in the age of Rosas thousands were put in prison, killed, or exiled from Argentina.

Not all people were against Rosas in fact some praised his methods stressed his patriotism and praised him as an administrator and public servant; in 1898 Ernesto Quesada, a lawyer, historian, and sociologist of Buenos Aires said

that Rosas laid the foundation on which Argentina was built. Twenty Years later Peruvian historian F. Garcia Calderon wrote:

Like all great American dictators, Rosas proved to be eminent administrator of public finances. In a time of national disturbance and military expenditure he displayed an extraordinary zeal in organizing and publishing the national accounts... Rosas was vigorous in assuring the service of the external debt; he accumulated neither neither loans nor fresh taxes. His economic policy was orderly and far-seeing... his invulnerable dictatorship was based upon material progress and fiscal order, (Dusenberry, 496).

As can be seen by these two examples Rosas was not hated by everyone, but he also was not loved by everyone and the truth of Rosas is somewhere in between. It is difficult to place Rosas because there is hardly a unbiased opinion of him.

Rosas is almost always diffined as a caudillo, but not just any he was one of the first. It is important to know what a caudillo is if one is to fully understand Rosas; a caudillo is deffined as a political-military leader at the head of an authoritative power. The Caudillos would gain power over a place and put themselves on top as the leader. Caudillos were capable of commanding lots of people and holding the attention of large crowds with growing excitement. Caudillos are know for the use of force to enforce what needed to be done. More often then not a Caudillo would use his position to promote their own position

because their power was more often than not unchecked, which allowed them to do what they wanted to.

Rosas came from a family of wealthy land owners. Rosas was put in charge of a few ranches for his parents, but this was not good enough for him, he wanted his own fortune. He married a young and strong-minded woman who proved to be a very good wife and prudent woman that watched out for his interests when he was away from Buenos Aires. Rosas won the hearts of many men that worked for him, due to his leadership. Rosas knew his business; he was one of the best at breaking horses. This is where he made his fortune, (Gofen, 20).

Rosas gained power and wealth very quickly; he became a major land and cattle owner. His own ships exported beef to Brazil and Cuba. His investments brought him further lands than were owned by Indians in the West and South of Argentina.

At a young age, Juan Manuel de Rosas served under Jacques de Liniers against the British invaders of the Rio de la Plata, which took place from 1806-1807. By the time he became an all out caudillo it was 1820 and he was moving into politics and by leading a force of gauchos in support of the conservatives and federalism. After the deposition and execution (1828) of Manuel Dorrego, he became the federalist leader, (Gofen, 107).

His rise to power represented the rise of the *estancieros*, the new landed oligarchy based on commercial ranching. Together with Estanislao Lopez, he defeated Juan Lavalle, and became governor (1829) of Buenos Aires with

dictatorial powers. Aided by Lopez and Juan Facundo Quiroga, he waged a sanguinary campaign against the Unitarians, destroying their movement, (Robertson, 130).

When Rosas became governor people saw him as a young and handsome. He was someone that the people could relate to; he was a gaucho. They did not know the things that he would do to gain more power. Rosas would resign from his position of governor in 1832 so that he could control more land further. He came back three years later as a national hero and more powerful than ever.

Rosas became governor again in 1835 and started to show how he really was using violence to accomplish his goals. The first famous incident of cruelty came when ordered the death of his prisoners while cutting the throat of a twelve-year-old child that was caught with the prisoners. At that time Rosas started a new fashion of wearing a red ribbon showing support for Federal rule. That red ribbon later became the symbol of Rosas' cruelty.

Over the next 17 years Rosas would become more violent and power hungry with each death. His death squads, the Mazorca, ruled the streets of Buenos Aires and many citizens were forced to keep to themselves for fear of personal safety.

Rosas went after any opposition that rose up while he was expanding his personal fortune. Rosas argued with other countries like Brazil, England, and France over import taxes. His over taxation brought on a blockade of Buenos Aires that lasted almost 12 years by those countries. The blockades helped the

cattle business because cattle were no longer slaughtered and sent to countries outside but instead stayed inside the country. The cattle population tripled during that time, (Gofen, 107-108).

By 1851 all of Rosas' enemies seemed to be gone and with no one left to stop him it seemed that he would rule until his death but then the estancieros, the ranch owners that originally brought Rosas to power rose up against him. General Justo Jose de Urquiza gathered support and an able army to beat Rosas' troops in the battle of Caseros. Rosas was beaten. Rosas no longer had any support so he fled to England and spent the rest of his life in exile. His reign was controversial because even though he did many terrible things some people believed that he was a good man and others did not. Two American men in the same position and different times with two completely different views of Rosas show that your relationship with Rosas could be the same but your view of him would not always be.

John Forbes was the American *Charge d'Affaires* at Buenos Aires when Rosas became governor in 1829. On November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1829 Forbes went to Rosas' house in the town and Rosas received him with open arms, and in fact ordered the room to be cleared of all other visitors. During their time together Rosas told Forbes all about the motives of his policies. Forbes believed Rosas was noble and patriotic, and called him "a man of magnanimity and moderation," (Dusenberry, 497).

Rosas was chosen governor by a junta selected by the membership of the legislature of Buenos Aires province. At the installation ceremony Forbes

observed Rosas and described him as moderately educated, similar to the strong-minded farmers of the United States, who were the best guarantee of national liberty:

Rosas, however differs from anything we have in our country inasmuch as he owes his great popularity among the gauchos and the common peasantry, to his having assimilated himself to the greatest extremity to their most singular form of life, their dress, their labors, and even their sport...In his manner he is extremely mild, and has something of the reflection and reserve of a indian chief. All of his conversations are full of excellent judgment and knowledge of the affairs of his country, and the most cordial and sincere patriotism, (Dusenberry, 497-498).

Almost all of Forbes letters back to Washington showed that he was impressed with Rosas but he died during his stay in Buenos Aires. Francis Baylies took over Forbes' position in 1832 and he did not share that same view of Rosas with Forbes. This might have been due the relations between the governments of Buenos Aires and the United States because Argentina seized three American fishing vessels near the Falkland Islands.

The strain between the two governments shows up in Baylies letters back to Washington. But even the letters that Baylies writes back shows that he is completely so thing of Rosas mainly his looks. Even though Baylies compliments Rosas on his looks, that is all he compliments him on. Baylies deplores Rosas' ignorance of the law, which was amplified by the fact that he

held so much power. Baylies claimed that Rosas had no knowledge of international or even municipal law and no knowledge of common forms of public business. With his power Rosas could do whatever he wanted he could close courts, imprison people, and control the press all on his authority alone, (Dusenberry, 498)

Baylies not only condemned the methods of Rosas but also called out the lack of patriotism and their want for integrity by the Argentinians in general. Baylies claimed the United States should sign no treaty with the authorities in Buenos Aires, because the United States would follow it but they "would consider a violation of the treaty no greater than a lie told by a school boy," (Dusenberry, 499).

These two views are very different for two people that were in the same position. It could be the reflection of the tension between the two governments, it could be bribery, it could be racism, but every account is biased. The Truth may lay somewhere inbetween. Rosas may have really been a patriot thinking that what he did was good for his country or he may have been searching to gain control of more for himself. He may have had good intentions when he came to power but turned corrupt with having so much. There are different views by everyone but the evidence is there of Rosas murdering people to eliminate his enemies, that is the one part of his reign that can not be disputed and he will always be one of the first famous caudillos in South America.



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